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THESIS

**COMMANDING OFFICER'S STANDING ORDERS: A
POWERFUL AND UNIQUE GENRE**

by

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June 2006

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**COMMANDING OFFICER'S STANDING ORDERS: A POWERFUL AND UNIQUE
GENRE**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

Commanding Officer's Standing Orders are critical to shipboard watch standing. Written by the captain and used by watch standers, Standing Orders perform many unique and powerful functions aboard ships. Using genre theory, this study provides insight into the specific roles Standing Orders play. This insight also provides deeper perspective into commanding officer to watch stander relationships, as well as the nature of CO power aboard ships. Deeper understanding of the role Standing Orders play provides new perspective on shipboard relationships, communication, and culture. In turn, this new perspective can lead to reevaluation of Standing Order function and use.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. WHAT ARE STANDING ORDERS

Upon taking command, captains of Navy ships promulgate Standing Orders, a written discourse that illustrates the commanding officer's views on how he or she wants the ship to operate. Standing Orders provide the ship's crew with the CO's leadership style and priorities while also relating his or her specific guidance for everything from conducting flight operations to dumping sewage. Additionally, a commanding officer's Standing Orders are used on a daily, sometimes hourly basis by bridge watch standers.

B. THE SAME, YET DIFFERENT

In many ways Standing Orders share features from ship to ship and commanding officer to commanding officer. For example, all Standing Orders list situations in which watch standers are required to call the captain. They are so similar in this regard that many commanding officers adopt their predecessor's Standing Orders with minimal change. However, COs also use the document to provide their decision-making philosophies to their watch standers. How can Standing Orders be so similar in so many ways while remaining unique to individual commanding officers?

C. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

Standing Orders play a major role in the safe operation of billion dollar ships. They teach watch standers, authorize action with the authority of the ship's captain, and provide specific guidance for critical situations. Furthermore, the idea of Standing Orders is

nearly as old as ships themselves. The scope of what Standing Orders actually do aboard ship is unique.

The importance of this document, coupled with a lack of existing research, suggests the usefulness of an in-depth examination of Commanding Officer's Standing Orders. This study will provide a greater understanding of the nature of this critical document. Critical theory-based analysis of Standing Orders provides valuable insight into the commanding officer's power, shipboard communication channels, differences between COs, and watch stander action among other topics.

D. WHAT IT MEANS

Greater understanding of these dynamics can provide both commanding officers and watch standers a more comprehensive understanding of their environment. In other words, this study attempts to make the implicit functions of Standing Orders explicit. With deeper understanding, commanding officers can critically examine what their Standing Orders do and decide if change is necessary or not. Furthermore, watch standers can see how differences in CO philosophy are manifested in Standing Orders, allowing them to better respond to these differences.

The next chapter explains genre theory and discusses how it provides a framework for deeper understanding of Standing Orders. Chapter III explains my methodology in conducting this research. Chapter IV discusses my research findings while applying genre theory in order to develop deeper meaning. The fifth and final chapter discusses the importance of this research as well as areas of interest for further Standing Order research.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. INTRODUCTION

Genre theory provides a useful and comprehensive framework to analyze written communication. More than focusing on merely form and content, genre analysis provides a framework for understanding both documents and the organizations in which those documents are used. In this chapter, I will first give an overview of what constitutes genre, followed by several organizational characteristics that genre can help us understand. The last section describes the value of applying genre theory to Commanding Officer's Standing Orders.

B. GENRE THEORY AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

1. What is Genre

Genre, when applied to written communication is "a single mechanism generating similarity throughout the wide expanses of variation"¹ that exists in texts. In other words, genre can be used to find similarities and assign classifications to types of documents. There are two interrelated ideas with which to find these textual similarities that define a genre. The first is document use and the second is communicative purpose.

2. Genre and Document Use

Bazerman says that written communication genres depend not only on the physical characteristics of the document but also on how the text is used:

¹ Charles Bazerman. *Shaping Written Knowledge: The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science*. (WAC Clearinghouse Landmark Publications in Writing Studies, 2000), http://wac.colostate.edu/aw/books/bazerman_shaping/ (accessed 7 March, 2006). Originally published in print, 1988, by University of Washington Press, Madison, Wisconsin.

The emergence of certain patterns of written communication gives generic qualities not only to texts, but to the way the texts are used in situations themselves. Writing is a social action. Regularized forms of writing are social institutions, interacting with other social institutions.²

Russell agrees, saying that "we must go beyond the conventional notion of genre as a set of formally definable text features that certain texts have in common across various contexts, however defined, and consider genre in relation to social action and social motives."³ In other words, texts do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, they play a significant role in the social tapestry of an organization. For example, the report card in elementary schools provides students with their grades. At the same time, when students compare report cards with one another, the document takes on a different social role. The role shifts from being informational to comparative in nature. Form and content are not enough to understand and classify a genre. Observing a class of documents in use can tell us a good deal about written communication, especially when we gain insight into the communicative purpose of documents within the genre.

3. Communicative Purpose

John Swales maintains that genre is "a class of communicative events, the members of which share a set of communicative purposes."⁴ Put simply, the way to classify a genre is by what the documents are supposed to do. Every communication has purpose. If documents share purpose, we

² Bazerman, *Shaping Written Knowledge*.

³ David R. Russell. "Rethinking Genre in Society: An Activity Theory Analysis." *Written Communication* 14, no.4, (October 1997): 4.

⁴ John M. Swales. *Genre Analysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 58.

may be able to classify them as a genre. Additionally, a true understanding of communicative purpose(s) requires observation of genre use. However, determining communicative purpose is not as simple as it may sound.

4. Determining Genre

To understand genre, we must go past form and content and determine how a document is actually used. Understanding the full communicative purpose of a genre is impossible without studying the document in action. Observing a class of documents in "their actual social contexts of use"⁵ often brings out surprising notions of communicative purpose.

The parking ticket genre seems to be fairly straightforward. A parking ticket is written by a parking policeman to penalize illegal behavior. However, taken in context (or socially), the parking ticket takes on additional meaning. Perhaps a rich homeowner complains about illegal parking in his or her neighborhood. Because of the complaint, the police chief tells the parking attendant to strictly enforce parking violations near the complainant's house.

In this situation, the parking ticket becomes a means of retribution for the homeowner and an attempt to gain favor on the part of the police chief. Observing the document in action illustrates generic qualities beyond the document itself. The meaning of the simple parking ticket is now, "coloured by personal ambition, private intentions, and individual experience."⁶ Without interviewing the

⁵ Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas N. Huckin, "Rethinking Genre From a Sociocognitive Perspective." *Written Communication* 10, no. 4, (October, 1993): 481.

⁶ Ken Hyland, *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in*

police chief and perhaps the homeowner, the full meaning of the parking ticket might never be clear.

C. WHY DOES IT MATTER?

1. Genre Formation

According to Amy Devitt, genres are created and develop in this way:

Genres develop, then, because they respond appropriately to situations that writers encounter repeatedly...writers respond in fitting ways and hence similarly to recurring situations; then, the similarities among those responses become established as generic conventions...the fact that others have responded to similar situations in the past in similar ways—the fact that genres exist—enables us to respond more easily and more appropriately ourselves. Knowing the genre, therefore, means knowing such things as appropriate subject matter, level of detail, tone, and approach, as well as the usual layout and organization. Knowing the genre means knowing not only, or even most of all, how to conform to a given situation.⁷

In order to classify multiple documents as a genre, they must be similar. As discussed above, those similarities turn largely on communicative purpose and social use. It follows then, that documents with the same communicative purpose exist because people had a similar need to communicate that purpose. A shared way to convey the shared purpose can become a genre.

Continuing with the parking ticket example, some time ago, police chiefs tired of people parking in fire lanes. Eventually, they told their officers to put notes on illegally parked cars. The chiefs started writing notes

Academic Writing (San Francisco: Longman, 2000), 155.

⁷ Amy J. Devitt. "Generalizing About Genre: New Conceptions of an Old Concept." *College Composition and Communication* 44, no.4, (December 1993): 576.

with warnings on them. Perhaps they said, 'move your car or you will pay the police department \$4.00.' As more cars parked illegally and more police chiefs got fed up, the notes became codified. They began to realize that they needed a way to present parking tickets quickly and effectively. Parking notes became parking tickets. So, preventing illegally parked cars was a recurring problem and the parking ticket genre developed in response.

Understanding the recurring situations that genres address allows us insight into "deep-seated regularities in the...organization."⁸ By examining the situations for which genres form, we gain much deeper understanding of an organization's "process and product of work."⁹ Through our understanding of the parking ticket, we can determine if its communicative purposes mesh with how the ticket is actually used.

2. Genre and Organization

Using genre to classify and study written communication "provide[s] a rich understanding of the dynamic relationship between genre activities and the social, historical, and institutional context in which those activities arise and are carried out."¹⁰ By studying written communication through generic analysis, we learn much about the organization and relationships in which that written communication functions. Devitt agrees, saying that "studies of particular genres...can reveal a great deal about the communities which construct and use those genres,

⁸ Charles Bazerman, *Constructing Experience*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), 87.

⁹ Ibid., 104.

¹⁰ Patricia L. Dunmire. "Genre as Temporally Situated Social Action: A Study of Temporality and Genre Action." *Written Communication* 17, no. 1, (January 2000): 94.

and studies of particular texts within those genres can reveal a great deal about the choices those writers make."¹¹

Say, for example, the police chief has created the parking ticket and in the normal course of business, the parking officer fills out the ticket and leaves a copy on the illegally parked car. The officer then takes a copy of the ticket and gives it to the county clerk for processing. However, let's assume the parking ticket says that parking in a fire lane is a criminal offense. Additionally, because this is in a small town, the chief wants to hear about any incidences of citizens parking in a fire lane. He wants to speak to the parker personally about the hazards created by blocking a fire lane.

We can now see that the chief, through the parking ticket, has created an organizational pathway outside the norm. Genre allows better insight into the police department's many levels of "social cooperation and permission."¹²

3. Genre and Change

In addition, genres "are always sites of contention between stability and change. They are inherently dynamic, constantly (if gradually) changing over time in response to the sociocognitive needs of individual users."¹³

Common generic characteristics provide stability (or similarity) to documents within a genre. In other words, a parking ticket is a parking ticket. At the same time, individual writers make small changes, "giving expression

¹¹ Devitt, "Generalizing About Genre," 581.

¹² Charles Bazerman, *Constructing Experience*, 32.

¹³ Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas N. Huckin, "Rethinking Genre From a Sociocognitive Perspective," 481.

to their intentions."¹⁴ These small personal touches can subtly change meaning within the genre.

The police chief from the example above felt that fire lane parking was important enough to warrant him speaking with each violator. However, people of the town got tired of being lectured and elected a new chief. This chief felt that there were far more important things to worry about in the town. She reflected her belief by making the parking ticket wording less harsh. So, parking ticket carries the same overall meanings but incrementally changes in its communicative purpose.

Genres change incrementally because they are affected by "personal ambition, private intentions, and individual experience."¹⁵ Understanding where and how these "subtle manipulations"¹⁶ occur give us insight into what the changes mean to the organization. Differences in the use of the parking ticket tell us much about the priorities of the police chief.

4. Genre and Power

Finally, genre allows us to identify and examine the holders of power within an organization. As Winsor says, texts in a genre act "as a concrete representation of [user and writer] interaction."¹⁷ In other words, "because the produced discursive objects are in a sense concrete, although symbolic...they provide a concrete locus for the

¹⁴ Ken Hyland, *Disciplinary Discourses*, 173.

¹⁵ Ken Hyland, *Disciplinary Discourses*, 173.

¹⁶ Ken Hyland, *Disciplinary Discourses*, 173.

¹⁷ Dorothy A. Winsor. "Ordering Work: Blue-Collar Literacy and the Political Nature of Genre." *Written Communication* 17, no. 2, (April 2000):158-159.

enactment of social structure."¹⁸ So, in effect, generic texts can help reinforce—even define—the social structure of an organization.

Texts are tangible "social institutions, interacting with other social institutions."¹⁹ As such, they act as documentation that explicitly and implicitly point out relationships within an organization. These relationships are the foundation of social structure. So, writers in genres hold real power by producing documents that define and refine social structure.

By the nature of his or her job, a police chief holds power over citizens. By looking at individual parking tickets and how they are used, we can see more clearly the relationship between the police chief and the genre reader, the illegally parked citizen. The police chief has the authority, through law and the court system, to fine a law-breaker. The parking ticket acts as a symbol of this authority. Through language and symbolic meaning, the parking ticket underlines and reinforces the police chief's authority.

D. NAVAL PURPOSE

Every vessel in the United States Navy has a commanding officer, also known as the ship's captain. Every captain has a document known as Standing Orders. In this paper, I will classify Commanding Officer's Standing Orders as a unique and extremely interesting genre by using the theoretical framework related above.

¹⁸ Charles Bazerman, "Discursively Structured Activities." <http://education.ucsb.edu/%7Ebazerman/17.discursive.doc/> (accessed 08 March 2006). Originally published in *Mind, Culture, Activity* 4, no.4, (1997).

¹⁹ Ibid.

Determining genre characteristics is critically important. It allows us to take major strides in understanding an organization. In other words, by defining Standing Orders as a genre, we begin to dissect and understand the complex relationship between a Commanding Officer and members of the bridge watch team, most specifically the Officer of the Deck. We gain insight into the history, nature of change, organization, and power relationships aboard ships. We make explicit previously implicit notions of command, watch standing, and decision-making contained in the document and manifested through its use. In the following chapter, I will explain the research methods I used to collect, organize, and analyze data used in this research.

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III. METHODOLOGY

A. PURPOSE

This study's purpose is to answer the following question: What are Standing Orders and how are they used aboard ships? To fully answer this question, I needed to go beyond study of Standing Orders themselves by speaking with commanding officers and watch standers. Interviews would allow me to understand the perspectives of both the writers and the users more completely.

B. PARTICIPANTS

I conducted interviews with three commanding officers and eight officers of the deck. This combination allowed me to gain a broad cross-section of standing order users. In interviewing OODs from the same ships as their COs, I would get data from both writers and users in addition to deeper insight into how Standing Orders operate in action aboard ship.

I scheduled interviews with all three commanding officers, which are identified in the study with the letters A, B, and C. The OODs are numbered one through eight. Desiring broad perspective, I interviewed two commanding officers in their first command tour and one in his second. The two first tour captains held the rank of Commander (O-5) while the second tour CO was a Captain (O-6). This spread in commanding officer interviewees allowed me to gather data points at different experience levels. The officers of the deck varied in experience as well. Several interviewees had prior enlisted experience, others had significant officer of the deck experience, while some were newly minted OODs.

I chose different ship types for of the interviews based on ship and commanding officer availability. Two interviews focused on small cruiser/destroyer type vessels while the third focused on an amphibious landing ship. Interviewing watch standers from different classes of ships provided another point for comparison. For example, the mission of the amphibious ship and the mission of the cruiser/destroyer are completely different. This difference allowed for possible differences in participants based on ship type and mission.

C. PROCEDURE

Interviews were conducted aboard all three ships. The three commanding officer interviews took place in the Captain's Cabin. Officer of the deck interviews occurred in various staterooms. For all of the interviews, I explained the purpose of my research and tried to put the participants at ease, assuring them that their answers would remain anonymous. Interviews with commanding officers lasted approximately one hour while OOD interviews ranged from thirty minutes to an hour.

I conducted the interviews using open-ended questions because they provide, "more information...about the particular perspectives of the individual" interviewed rather than that of the interviewer.²⁰ Because my research was focused on document meaning and use, open-ended questions allowed for fuller exploration of participant responses. Using open questions also allowed me to better determine, in the words of Frey, Botan, and Kreps, "what

²⁰ Lawrence R. Frey, Carl H. Botan, and Gary L. Kreps, *Investigating Communication: An Introduction to Research Methods* 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000, 100.

respondents [thought was] important"²¹ about Standing Orders instead of leading them toward specific answers. Furthermore, I conducted the interviews using a semi-structured format that allowed me to follow up on responses rather than sticking rigidly to a script. This type of format allowed me to investigate interesting responses while remaining focused on data pertinent to my research.

D. DATA ANALYSIS

I began my analysis by transcribing all of the interviews verbatim. This allowed me to review the data I had gathered and begin to examine it critically while putting it into written form. Following transcription, I carefully examined the data for common themes based on how respondents viewed function and use of Standing Orders. I then grouped similar data into themes, resulting in a thematic summary based on broad categories of function and use.

Using this summary, I listed each description of either function or use on note cards. Spreading the note cards out, I began to look for connections or themes between the data points. This process led me to four overarching purposes of Standing Orders.

E. LITERATURE REVIEW

I also examined relevant literature on written communication and organizations. This review resulted in the idea that Standing Orders could be effectively defined as a unique genre. In fact, genre theory provided an extremely useful theoretical framework with which to describe the four purposes of Standing Orders. Furthermore, genre theory provided the link between

²¹ Charles J. Stewart and William B. Cash, *Interviewing: Principles and Practices* 10th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 56

Standing Orders as a document and Standing Orders as a window to deeper understanding of shipboard watch standing relationships and organization.

The next chapter explains the role that Standing Orders play aboard Navy ships. As discussed above, several themes emerged through analysis of the interviews. These themes are fully explored in the next chapter. Furthermore, genre theory is used to give insight into what these themes tell us about several characteristics of shipboard watch standing.

IV. ANALYSIS

This chapter will both define Standing Orders as a genre and provide deeper insight into the nature of shipboard watch standing relationships using genre theory. First, I will generally describe Standing Orders as a genre using communicative purpose as the guide. Next, in the first part of each major section I will define the generic characteristics of Standing Orders using interview results. In the second part of each section, I will show how Standing Orders give deeper insight into shipboard watch standing relationships through the lens of genre theory.

A. STANDING ORDERS AS A GENRE

Commanding Officer's Standing Orders act powerfully aboard a Navy warship. As a document they provide guidance to key watch standing personnel in critical situations. They also act as a surrogate for the Commanding Officer when he or she is not present on the ship's bridge. They teach inexperienced officers how to think and react in both specific and non-specific situations. Perhaps most importantly, Standing Orders relate the leadership and watch standing philosophy of the Captain of every ship.

Standing Orders perform these functions aboard all U.S. naval vessels. Every commanding officer writes, or at least signs, Standing Orders. Every officer of the deck reads and uses Standing Orders. The Standing Orders document provides bridge watch standers with commanding officer guidance. These similar functions contribute greatly toward classifying Standing Orders as a specific genre.

Communicative purpose may also act as the primary classifier of genre. This being the case, Standing Orders must share communicative purpose—common from CO to CO—in order to be classified as a unique genre. Using a broad brush, Standing Orders can be defined as a genre having four common communicative themes:

1. Standing Orders establish and reinforce the commanding officer's singular authority aboard naval warships.
2. The texts make years of tacit knowledge explicit for watch standers.
3. Standing Orders codify and promulgate commanding officers' core philosophies.
4. These powerful documents facilitate prompt and efficient action in high-risk, high-pressure situations.

B. ESTABLISHMENT AND REINFORCEMENT OF CO AND WATCH STANDER RELATIONSHIPS

A commanding officer's Standing Orders both establish and reinforce the relationships between the commanding officer and his watch standers. The nature of this relationship is critical to proper and safe watch standing. I will first define the legal responsibility of both the commanding officer and the officer of the deck. Next, I will show how Standing Orders define and reinforce these relationships. I will then use genre theory to examine the nature of commanding officer power in Standing Orders. Finally, I will show what genre theory can tell us about how shipboard organization and communications are reflected in Standing Orders.

1. Responsibility and Authority

All watch standers aboard U.S. naval vessels have some form of responsibility and authority. Even the most junior lookout has the responsibility to keep a sharp watch on the sea and the authority to make a contact known. The commanding officer and the officer of the deck have explicitly defined roles aboard ship. These role definitions specifically delineate OOD and CO areas of responsibility and authority.

a. Commanding Officer

According to United States Navy Regulations, "the responsibility of the commanding officer for his or her command is absolute..."²² Any event that takes place aboard a ship is the captain's responsibility. The burden of responsibility is weighty and inescapable in the Navy. For example, absence from the bridge during a collision does not relieve the commanding officer of responsibility for the accident and its results.

b. Officer of the Deck

The watch stander most responsible to the commanding officer is the officer of the deck. In fact, *Navy Regulations* say that the officer of the deck is below only the captain in his or her responsibility for ship safety.

The officer of the deck underway is that officer on watch designated by the commanding officer to be in charge of the ship. He is primarily responsible, under the captain, for the safe and proper operation of the ship and for the safety and performance of her personnel.²³

²² Navy Regulations (1990).

²³ James Stavridis and William P. Mack, *Command at Sea*, 5th ed. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 183.

When actually standing the watch, the officer of the deck is responsible to the commanding officer for the safety of the ship. In other words, if the OOD neglects to call the commanding officer to the bridge, he or she shares the burden of responsibility with the captain.

c. Commanding Officer to Officer of the Deck Relationship

The relationship between the commanding officer and the officer of the deck is critically important to ship safety and efficient watch standing. The *Watch Officer's Guide* sums up this relationship succinctly:

When he accepts designation as officer of the deck, he automatically accepts accountability for everything entrusted to him. Just as the commanding officer is inescapably accountable to his superior for everything that happens aboard his ship, so is the OOD accountable to the commanding officer for everything that happens during his watch.²⁴

Both positions hold significant authority and responsibility, yet the commanding officer remains ultimately responsible. Commanding officers must explicitly convey their responsibility to watch standers in general and to the officer of the deck in particular. Standing Orders are one way in which Captains explicitly convey these responsibilities.

2. Standing Orders, Responsibility, and Authority

In setting forth responsibilities, commanding officers speak first to the burden that lies with the officer of the deck. This is the same responsibility and authority explicitly defined in *Navy Regulations*. Furthermore, commanding officers set forth guidelines for decision-

²⁴ David A. Lee and others, eds., *Watch Officer's Guide* 12th ed. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1987), 5.

making authority in Standing Orders. By choosing to retain or relinquish decision-making authority, commanding officers further define their shipboard authority.

a. CO to OOD Relationship

Standing Orders explicitly reinforce the responsibility of both commanding officer and officer of the deck. In order to stand watch as an officer of the deck, a junior officer must be certified by the commanding officer. Standing orders explicitly delineate the responsibility and authority that goes along with this qualification.

As Commanding Officer (CO), I am absolutely responsible to take all necessary and proper measures under the laws, regulations, and customs to promote and safeguard the morale, physical well-being, and general welfare of the officers and enlisted personnel under my command. By assigning you as OOD, I have placed a special trust and confidence in your abilities and judgment.²⁵

While defining the authority and responsibility of the officer of the deck, the captain also reiterates his own responsibility and authority. This type of explicit statement in Standing Orders clearly reifies the nature of the CO to OOD relationship for both parties. In turn, the Commanding Officer solidifies and entrenches his or her positional power in the shipboard setting. He or she accepts responsibility yet makes subordinate watch standers—especially the officer of the deck—clearly aware of their weighty responsibilities.

²⁵ Commanding Officer's Standing Orders, United States Navy warship, 2005.

b. Decision-Making

Commanding officers further define watch-standing relationships through the application of decision-making triggers. As the person ultimately responsible for the safety and well-being of ship and crew, the captain uses Standing Orders to reserve his or her right to make certain decisions. One CO says that Standing Orders allow him to "make the decisions about...what's a concern and not [watch standers]." ²⁶ The commanding officer uses Standing Orders to ensure his ability to exercise judgment.

Standing Orders discuss events requiring commanding officer permission as well as actions requiring commanding officer notification. While similar, notifications and permissions differ significantly. By requiring watch standers to request permission for an event to happen, the Captain effectively reserves the right to decide. The captain retains control over these types of events. In other words, a watch stander, usually the OOD, must take action for the event to occur. Because the watch stander is under the commanding Officer's authority, the CO retains overall decision-making authority by requiring the OOD call before the action is taken.

Additionally, events requiring CO's permission usually carry the risk of significant injury or equipment damage. For example, Commanding officers may require the OOD to get his or her permission prior to launching a small boat. This event is considered dangerous because lowering a boat with passengers aboard has the potential for injury.

²⁶ Interview with commanding officer C.

In requiring notification of an event, the commanding officer wishes to be informed of an event beyond his or her control. In this second type of decision trigger, the CO considers the event to fall within the OOD's decision purview. The captain may expect the officer of the deck to approve an action and notify him or her when that the action has begun. For example, some COs require that officers of the deck report when they have been relieved by the next OOD. In this case, watch standers have taken action and the captain wants to be informed after the fact.

In the same category of required notifications, Standing Orders deal with those events that no one on the ship can control. These are pieces of information, "important enough that needs to be passed up,"²⁷ to the CO for his use in decision-making. Captains require notification of events such as ships passing close enough to be considered a collision risk or the sighting of an unknown vessel.

Finally, Standing Orders address decision-making in a singular situation that combines some elements of both permission and notification. Requiring notification of a closely approaching ship is a unique form of withheld decision-making by the commanding officer. Standing Orders provide detailed communicative scripts for watch stander use when reporting to the commanding officer. These scripts, called "contact reports," are an integral part of bridge watch standing.²⁸ Standing Orders provide a specific

²⁷ Interview with commanding officer C.

²⁸ Closest Point of Approach (CPA) is a term used to describe the distance at which a vessel is expected to pass to one's own. Based on visual and RADAR information, watch standers can easily determine the

format, usually unique to each commanding officer, for watch standers to use when making this type of report.

The specific format for contact reports serves quite literally as a means for the commanding officer to imagine a critical situation in his or her head. One CO said that contact reports made in a specified format allow him to "paint the mental picture"²⁹ of an unidentified contact and subsequently judge the risk of collision. An incorrectly worded contact report "screws [the CO] up because [he or she] expect[s] the next piece of information to paint that picture"³⁰ correctly. So in this case, the CO withholds decision-making authority by requiring watch standers to call. He or she then uses watch stander provided information to make a decision as to the seriousness of the threat. In other words, the commanding officer makes guidance concerning this type of withheld decision-making very specific. This specificity most likely stems from the potential damage to life and limb resulting from a collision at sea. As we shall see later in this analysis, commanding officers tend to be more specific with their guidance in more critical or dangerous situations.

3. Genre and Power

The military in general, and naval organizations specifically, are very clear in their assignment of power. Naval regulations and institutional norms identify these

course, speed, and CPA of any vessel close enough to see. All Commanding Officers specify a CPA range at which they are to be notified. The Captain then actively decides if he or she is comfortable with the Officer of the Deck's decision. This process allows the CO to establish a buffer zone and ultimately allows him to maintain responsibility for ship safety.

²⁹ Interview with commanding officer A.

³⁰ Ibid.

power holders by position. The commanding officer of a naval vessel does not fully create his or her responsibility through Standing Orders. Due to the nature of the Navy, CO responsibility has been created over hundreds of years of tradition and experience. It is very clear; commanding officers are singularly and unwaveringly responsible for their ship.

While not the sole creator of CO power, the Standing Orders genre plays a critical role in establishing authoritative relationships aboard ships. Although the commanding officer clearly understands his or her role, captains depend on the crew to safeguard his or her ultimate responsibility through their performance. Accordingly, the CO must make both his and their responsibilities absolutely clear. As such, standing orders operate as a genre. Drawing from Donna Kain's argument about genre construction, Standing Orders can be said to "impose obligations and establish relationships"³¹ on and with watch standers to accomplish this task of defining and reinforcing CO to watch stander relationships.

In imposing obligations and establishing relationships, Standing Orders define power in two ways. First, they provide a means for the commanding officer to reserve power. In other words, they allow the commanding officer to keep decision-making authority. Second, they delegate power to subordinate watch standers by giving them leave to make decisions.

³¹ Donna J. Kain, "Constructing Genre: A Threefold Typology," *Technical Communication Quarterly* 14, no.4 (2005).

a. Reserved Power

Hyland says that generic texts act as, "sites of power and authority"³² within an organization. As such, Standing Orders reinforce commanding officer authority and responsibility by setting boundaries between them and their watch standers. Reserving decision-making authority is one component of these power boundaries. As noted in the previous section, captains view Standing Orders as guidance on when to be notified and expect their Standing Orders to help them "manage risk" aboard the ship.³³ By reserving their right to decide, COs further solidify the boundary between captain and watch stander. Explicitly withholding the power to make decisions on "high-risk evolutions" allows commanding officers to reinforce the notion that they will make decisions most important to the ship and crew.

Additionally, COs make guidance on reserved decisions specific. The more important the decision in terms of risk, the more specific Standing Orders guidance becomes. Commanding officers make items specific in their Standing Orders when there are "things [they] have to make a decision about," or that "require [their] direct oversight."³⁴ By making permissions and reports specific and absolutely clear to watch standers, the commanding officer further reinforces his authority on the ship. As Hyland points out, Standing Orders can be said to "serve the interests of the powerful"³⁵ in an organization. Aboard

³² Ken Hyland, *Disciplinary Discourses*, 155.

³³ Interview with commanding officer B.

³⁴ Interview with commanding officer B.

³⁵ Ken Hyland, *Disciplinary Discourses*, 157.

ship, they do so by reinforcing the commanding officer's absolute authority.

b. Delegated Power

Commanding officers act as, in Hyland's terms, "powerbrokers and gatekeepers"³⁶ when using Standing Orders to give authority to the officer of the deck. By not including certain situations in the standing orders, the commanding officer relinquishes decision-making authority and gives it to the officer of the deck. Captains encourage responsible decision-making and so do not want to "impinge on"³⁷ the authority given to the officer of the deck. The OOD is "being paid to have that watch,"³⁸ and must be "authorized to make...decision[s]."³⁹

In effect, commanding officers are specific when reserving decisional power for themselves in situations that are "too dangerous or too important"⁴⁰ to entrust to subordinates. However, they delegate power by omission. They expect watch standers "to think"⁴¹ and make decisions to keep the ship safe. A commanding officer will not be present for all critical decisions made on the bridge. Consequently, COs want watch standers to have the confidence necessary to make sound decisions in order to avoid risk. These watch stander decisions occur when time is too short for a call to the captain. For example, if the officer of the deck saw a darkened ship at the last minute, the commanding officer wants him or her to keep the

³⁶ Ken Hyland, *Disciplinary Discourses*, 157.

³⁷ Interview with commanding officer B.

³⁸ Interview with commanding officer A.

³⁹ Interview with officer of the deck A.

⁴⁰ Interview with officer of the deck A.

⁴¹ Interview with commanding officer C.

ship safe. In taking action to ensure ship safety, the officer of the deck is expected to decide and act even if the action taken would normally be preceded by a call to the captain.

c. Balance of Power

In the words of an officer of the deck, commanding officers "can't be up [on the bridge] twenty-four hours a day."⁴² Despite being ultimately responsible for the ship, captains use Standing Orders to tell watch standers how they "want [the watch] run when [they are] not there."⁴³ Commanding officers do not "ever want somebody just to be a robot,"⁴⁴ and must find a balance between making every decision and allowing watch standers to decide.

As established earlier, Navy norms and regulations clearly assign responsibility to both the captain and the officer of the deck. By clearly stating boundaries of power and authority, Standing Orders "define discipline-approved realities."⁴⁵ In the discipline that is bridge watch standing, commanding officers instantiate these norms for watch standers through the Standing Orders genre.

4. Genre and the Organization

In addition to its explication of commanding officer power, genre theory provides a means with which to gain deeper understanding of the way ships operate. By viewing Standing Orders as a genre, we can look more deeply into the organizational pathways that Standing Orders define and

⁴² Interview with commanding officer A.

⁴³ Interview with officer of the deck A.

⁴⁴ Interview with commanding officer C.

⁴⁵ Ken Hyland, *Disciplinary Discourses*, 155.

reinforce. In fact, because Standing Orders are written with a focus on bridge watch standing, genre theory sheds light on communication pathways between commanding officers and watch standers.

a. *Shipboard Organization*

Naval organizations are authoritarian and extremely hierarchical. The nature of naval service, commands and orders being crucial to safety and success, makes authoritarianism necessary. Aboard ships the commanding officer sits atop a well-defined pyramid structure. In the officer ranks on a medium-sized warship, the captain is at the pinnacle of the chain-of-command. The executive officer is number two, while four or five department heads operate below the captain. Finally, division officers make up the lowest level of officer leadership.

Officers standing watch on the bridge are either Officers of the Deck or officers working toward qualification. Officers working toward their OOD qualification are in large part division officers with little to no shipboard experience and are near the beginning of their first ship tour. Most qualified Officers of the Deck are also division officers but have more experience. They are usually at the end of their first or in their second sea tour. Finally, there are both OODs and aspirants with prior enlisted experience. Some of these officers have significant bridge watch standing experience while others come from backgrounds with little to no bridge experience.

b. A Unique Organizational Pathway

Viewing Standing Orders through the lens of genre theory allows us to better understand what Bazerman terms the "complex systems of social cooperation and participation"⁴⁶ between the commanding officer and his watch standers. Aside from the organizational chain-of-command presented above, Standing orders define a completely separate decision-making link. This alternate decision chain provides a direct link between the commanding officer and the officer of the deck. Interestingly, watch standers qualified as officer of the deck are division officers. In other words, Standing Orders establish the organizational framework for a hierarchy outside of rank based only on watch standing and commanding officer responsibilities.

The officer of the deck is the "person that's in charge of safe navigation and driving of the ship."⁴⁷ This being the case, captains require direct decision-making and reporting with the OOD so that he does not "have to be on the bridge the whole time."⁴⁸ By defining this pathway, Standing Orders make this direct and unique organizational linkage possible. Without this communication channel, the officer of the deck would have responsibility without the authority of a direct decision making connection with the captain.

C. MAKING TACIT KNOWLEDGE EXPLICIT

In addition to establishing and defining relationships between watch standers and the commanding officer, Standing Orders make tacit knowledge explicit. According to Nissen,

⁴⁶ Charles Bazerman, *Constructing Experience*, 32.

⁴⁷ Interview with commanding officer C.

⁴⁸ Interview with commanding officer C.

tacit knowledge is "implicit within the knower and inherently difficult to articulate."⁴⁹ In other words, some components of CO watch standing stem directly from personal experience.

A large part of personal experience is tacit and difficult to transfer. In order for tacit knowledge to be transferred it must be made explicit. Standing Orders make experiential knowledge explicit for bridge watch standers. In fact, Standing Orders do not merely contain knowledge based on personal experience but also contain experiential—and largely tacit—knowledge from mentors and from the rich commanding officer tradition. From the genre theory perspective, Standing Orders provide insight into genre formation and how making tacit knowledge explicit affects shipboard watch standing relationships.

1. Standing Orders and Tacit Knowledge

In addition to its many other functions, Standing Orders teach. They provide guidance to "new officers [and] new bridge watch standers that don't know where to go for information."⁵⁰ They also provide watch standers with "a good course of action"⁵¹ which allows them to deal with most critical situations. Furthermore, Standing Orders provide watch standers with best practices, procedures for carrying out dangerous evolutions safely and efficiently.

Standing orders, though, must present significant amounts of tacit knowledge explicitly. The incredibly important guidance found in Standing Orders comes from experience—the commanding officer's personal experience,

⁴⁹ Mark E. Nissen, *Harnessing Knowledge Dynamics: Principled Organizational Knowing & Learning*, Hershey: IRM Press (2006).

⁵⁰ Interview with commanding officer C.

⁵¹ Interview with commanding officer C.

experience of mentors and advisers, and organizational experience. To a large degree Standing Orders take all of this tacit knowledge and presents it in explicit form for less experienced watch standers.

a. *The Commanding Officer's Personal Experience*

The majority of Commanding officers in the United States Navy are at the pinnacle of their careers. They have served aboard ships from their days as division officers fresh from college, to Executive Officers eagerly awaiting their next assignment: command. All of them have had between eighteen and twenty years of experience. All have seen close calls at sea and all have been in high-risk stressful situations.

Much of a commanding officer's twenty-odd-years of shipboard experience is made up of tacit knowledge. Because this type of knowledge is based on years of experience it is very difficult to articulate, particularly to those with little practical experience. However, as we shall see, Standing Orders play an invaluable role by making experiential knowledge available to relatively inexperienced watch standers such as new bridge watch standers.

Over the course of their careers, these commanding officers stood watches on the bridge of several different types of ship. They have been brought "up gradually" in the "Navy's training pipeline" and have the experience necessary for command.⁵² The experience needed to effectively command a warship is the same experience

⁵² Interview with commanding officer C.

reflected in Standing Orders. In fact, some officers had "been thinking about [Standing Orders] for ten years."⁵³

Commanding Officers tend to adjust Standing Orders to address bad experiences. In fact, when captains "get burnt on something once, they get more cautious in that area."⁵⁴ If an event sticks out in the mind of a commanding officer, his Standing Orders reflect that event. For example, one CO lost control of the ship's steering earlier in his career and so made his Standing Orders "more strict than most captains" when discussing loss of steering procedures.⁵⁵ This captain has personally identified with a specific type of situation. The CO's decision to include detailed steering casualty procedures is a direct result of tacit knowledge gained throughout his career.

b. The Mentor Contribution

Beyond merely the personal experience of any specific CO, a CO's Standing Orders also contain experiences accumulated from commanding officers he has worked for or with in the past. Some use guidance from an officer who has already been in command, taking advice and suggestions about "brevity and keeping [Standing Orders] tight [in their wording]."⁵⁶ Other captains have mentors with similar command and watch standing philosophies as their own.⁵⁷ Either way, tacit knowledge, based primarily on experience, beyond the individual CO finds its way into every set of Standing Orders.

⁵³ Interview with commanding officer A.

⁵⁴ Interview with commanding officer A.

⁵⁵ Interview with commanding officer A.

⁵⁶ Interview with commanding officer B.

⁵⁷ Interview with commanding officer A.

In addition to individual mentors, commanding officers receive guidance during their command training at Surface Warfare Officer School in Newport, RI. During the Prospective Commanding Officer course, captains receive advice from many sources, including an advisory board composed of experienced former commanding officers.

They actually give you a board in the PCO pipeline...You have board in front of at least two, sometimes three post-command instructors. It's not like a pass or fail...but they ask you to explain what you wrote and they throw out some ideas like, 'do you really want to do this' or, 'hey that's a good idea' or, 'you might want to write this.' So it's not a pass or fail. They're your Standing Orders. More like an advisory board.⁵⁸

This type of advisory board represents more than seventy-five years of Navy experience. Furthermore, it helps to embed mentor experience into a new CO's Standing Orders and infuses them with still more tacitly based knowledge.

c. Organizational Experience

Most commanding officers do not write their own Standing Orders. When taking command, one CO "immediately...approved the existing Standing Orders."⁵⁹ Another decided that because the crew had already been trained on the previous Standing Orders, he would "keep them intact" while ensuring nothing in them was "stupid or unsafe."⁶⁰ Yet another said he "could live with the policy his predecessor laid down."⁶¹

⁵⁸ Interview with commanding officer A.

⁵⁹ Interview with commanding officer C.

⁶⁰ Interview with commanding officer B.

⁶¹ Interview with commanding officer A.

Watch standers with several years of experience say that "standing orders tend to differ not too much" between commanding officers.⁶² In fact, Standing Orders aboard individual ships seem to be a "progression of all the COs" that have had command aboard that ship.⁶³ In general, Standing Orders do not change significantly from commanding officer to commanding officer. This being the case, experience-based knowledge from several captains remains in most current sets of standing orders. So, organizational knowledge—again, mostly tacit in nature—is also made explicit to watch standers through Standing Orders.

On one hand, Standing Orders contain tacit knowledge from the current commanding officer. On the other, many commanding officers alter Standing Orders very little. This being the case, Standing Orders is fairly stable as a genre. Major content changes do not occur from document to document on each ship. However, significant changes do occur over time.

As technology such as the Global Positioning System (GPS) and RADAR systems increase the capabilities of bridge watch teams, mentor and organizational knowledge cannot provide adequate guidance. As such, a CO in command at the specific time of a technological advance, the introduction of GPS for example, is forced to learn how to integrate its new capabilities into his or her Standing Orders.

Standing Order changes like that above stem from changes in watch team capability. With GPS for example,

⁶² Interview with officer of the deck 1.

⁶³ Interview with officer of the deck 1.

the bridge watch team can find the position of the ship at all times and in any visibility conditions. These kinds of changes are not frequent, yet they serve as an example of how Standing Orders, as a genre, "change historically...and grow as the social context changes."⁶⁴ With new technologies and changed watch stander capabilities, the social context in which Standing Orders operate has been changed. This idea of change leads directly into how Standing Orders form in the first place.

2. Genre and the Formation of Standing Orders

According to Devitt, genres form in response "to situations writers face repeatedly."⁶⁵ Standing Orders have formed through two main recurring situations. First, Standing Orders respond to critical or high risk situations. Second, Standing Orders respond to the need to teach inexperienced bridge watch standers.

a. High-Risk Situations

Ships at sea are worlds unto their own. Unique in their autonomy, these ships face many dangerous situations. Technology and military threats change but many threatening situations remain the same. Until the last twenty years, ships could not use the RADAR systems to immediately determine the closest-point-of-approach to another vessel. Today, ships can with the click of a mouse see CPAs of all vessels within a given range. This type of technological advance changes the capabilities of watch standers. After being introduced to the fleet, Commanding officers must alter Standing Orders to reflect these new capabilities. The Standing Orders genre reflects these

⁶⁴ Amy J. Devitt, "Generalizing About Genre," 580.

⁶⁵ Amy J. Devitt, "Generalizing About Genre," 576.

recurring dangerous or potentially dangerous situations such as navigation as discussed above.

In some respects, Standing Orders are "written in blood."⁶⁶ Events, items, or guidance contained in Standing Orders are in many cases the direct result of death or injury. For example, Standing Orders contain a section discussing reduced visibility procedures. These procedures include calling the captain and stationing extra lookouts topside. Commanding Officers have faced foggy and rainy situations from the time of sail. Furthermore, hundreds of ships have run aground or collided with other vessels in restricted visibility situations. Standing Orders have responded to this recurring situation by providing specific watch stander guidance. As a genre, they give watch standers "knowledge about what [they] need to do and how they need to do it."⁶⁷

As a corollary, because Standing Orders form in response to recurring situations, they may contain some unnecessary information. In other words, some situations may have recurred in the past but may not have the same import as when they formed. As a part of their required reports, most commanding officers require notification when the ship's barometer drops by a specified amount. A drop in barometric pressure can indicate the approach of heavy weather, which is another recurring situation addressed by Standing Orders. However, advances in meteorology and communication seem to make it unlikely that a ship is "going to get whacked by a storm"⁶⁸ without ample warning.

⁶⁶ Interview with officer of the deck B.

⁶⁷ Donna J. Kain, "Constructing Genre."

⁶⁸ Interview with officer of the deck C.

Yet captains continue to require this report because it gives them, as one CO put it, "enough time to know that bad weather is coming and...do something" to make preparations.⁶⁹

At sea today, commanding officers have much more time to prepare for a storm using available forecasts. In this case, a recurring situation from the past became part of Standing Orders. However, the Standing Orders response to that situation—namely a reporting requirement for barometer drop—has not changed. Some material included in the genre has been eclipsed by changes in the social context, yet this material remains in Standing Orders. To apply Devitt's claim regarding genres, over time commanding officers recognized "a situation [they] or others had responded to in the past," and as such, "[their] response to that situation can be guided by past responses."⁷⁰ In some cases however, the strength of the guidance of past responses—even if no longer relevant—may lead toward a resistance to change in Standing Orders.

b. Teaching Watch Standers

Commanding Officers repeatedly face the challenge of teaching novice watch standers to make responsible decisions. In keeping with Devitt's work, Standing Orders originated as commanding officers' solutions to the "recurring rhetorical situation" of making tacit knowledge explicit for young officers.⁷¹ Standing Orders provide, "one stop shopping...especially to new officers [or] new bridge watch standers that don't necessarily know where to go for information, they...can go to the Standing Orders."⁷²

⁶⁹ Interview with commanding officer B.

⁷⁰ Amy J. Devitt. *Generalizing About Genre*. 576

⁷¹ Amy J. Devitt. *Generalizing About Genre*. 576.

⁷² Interview with commanding officer C.

So, Standing Orders have formed to meet the recurring watch stander training situation in two ways. First, they provide a reference for the inexperienced watch stander. They collate and organize valuable information that is "disparate [in] nature."⁷³ Secondly, they present this valuable information so that watch standers can "use their judgment"⁷⁴ to keep the ship safe. Both of these generic features lie in the nature of genre formation. Over time, Commanding Officers have repeatedly faced each of the above problems. The genre of Standing Orders has formed to respond to these occurrences.

3. Power, Genre, and Knowledge

We have seen that Standing Orders act as, in Bazerman's terms, a "concrete locus"⁷⁵ of power aboard ship. In other words, the Standing Orders document is an actual physical representation of the captain's responsibility and authority. Not only are they in printed form, but Standing Orders are also located on the bridge at all times and used every day by watch standers. Much of the genre's power lies in defining and emphasizing the power of experience and power of knowledge. By the title of the document, "Commanding Officer's Standing Orders," it is apparent where positional power lies. Merely by his or her rank, the commanding officer wields power over subordinates. However, Standing Orders refine and strengthen the CO's positional power by emphasizing the power of experience as well as the power of knowledge.

⁷³ Interview with commanding officer C.

⁷⁴ Interview with commanding officer B

⁷⁵ Charles Bazerman, "Discursively Structured Activities."

a. The Power of Experience

Captains' eighteen to twenty-two years of shipboard experience gives them legitimacy beyond just positional authority. As indicated previously, Standing Orders present watch standers with responses to specific situations. Because this knowledge is presented to watch standers through Standing Orders, the commanding officer's power is further reinforced. So, experience is not only reflected in how Standing Orders are formed but also in the commanding officer's power aboard the ship. While experience determines much of what Standing Orders contain, it also acts as a source of power. Commanding officers underscore their positional power through knowledge and experience-based power via Standing Orders. Genre theory provides an extremely useful framework to highlight what Askehave and Swales call the, "complex relationships between power and genre."⁷⁶

b. The Power of Knowledge

Through Standing Orders, commanding officers show expert power. Their knowledge of shipboard operation and situational response is partly based on experience as discussed above. In large part however, this expert power goes beyond experience alone. Knowledge power stems from years of training, both formal and informal.

Formally, captains go through a six-month command course in addition to various types of classroom training attended throughout their careers. This formal training involves mainly organizational and mentor experience as opposed to personal experience. This type of knowledge is

⁷⁶ Inger Askehave and John M. Swales, "Genre Identification and Communicative Purpose: A Problem and a Possible Solution," *Applied Linguistics* 22, no.2 (June 2001): 196.

taught rather than experienced. In other words, commanding officers add to their personal experience by learning from the experience of others. Commanding officers may not personally experience every situation related in Standing Orders. However, commanding officers have learned successful responses to those situations through others in what Devitt discusses as "different social groups" with knowledge of "historical change."⁷⁷ Captains learn experience-based knowledge from a social group with more experience. In this case, the social group consists of officers with previous command experience.

Standing Orders reflect informal training as well. Each captain has experience as an Officer of the Deck from his or her time as a division officer. He or she has learned from the standpoint of a Standing Order user. Furthermore, Commanding officers have inevitably served as executive officers, second in command aboard Navy ships. In addition to actually commanding their ships, captains usually mentor their XO's on command experiences, leadership, and theory. Again, this type of knowledge is not experienced first hand but carries weight in a CO's Standing Orders because it contains learned knowledge that more junior officers do not have.

D. ISSUE COMMANDING OFFICER PHILOSOPHY

In addition to making tacit knowledge explicit, Standing Orders verbalize the commanding officer's watch standing philosophy to the crew. Both explicitly and implicitly, COs use Standing Orders to relay expectations on how he or she wants the ship run. Using genre theory, we can understand how these expectations provide insight

⁷⁷ Amy J. Devitt, "Generalizing About Genre," 580.

into changes among Standing Orders between captains, as well as what the ability to change a genre tells us about CO power.

1. Philosophy Defined

Commanding Officers are expected to be leaders. As leaders, they run their ships in concert with leadership and watch standing philosophies. These philosophies influence every action a captain takes while in command. As single leaders of a tightly woven organization, watch standing and leadership philosophies directly affect a ship's crew. In the case of Standing Orders, a CO's philosophy is "how [the commanding officer] wants the ship to be operated and fought."⁷⁸ Additionally, this philosophy will reflect parts of each CO's "personal ambition, private intentions, and individual experience..."⁷⁹ Standing Orders not only define a CO's philosophy on how the ship should operate, they also reflect differences between COs and their beliefs.

Devitt notes that "individuals choose and create" within a genre to develop their own document.⁸⁰ The Standing Order genre is fairly rigid; there are few changes between documents. However, there are small changes that allow commanding officers to display and implement individual philosophies. In some cases, this philosophy is contained explicitly in the document. In others, watch standing philosophy is manifested through the commanding officer's use of Standing Orders. Whether specifically stated or evident through document use, Standing Orders

⁷⁸ Interview with commanding officer A.

⁷⁹ Ken Hyland, *Disciplinary Discourses*, 173.

⁸⁰ Amy J. Devitt, "Generalizing About Genre," 580.

play an integral role in presenting watch standers with their CO's philosophy.

2. Philosophy Manifested Through Standing Orders

Standing orders issue commanding officer philosophy in two distinct ways. First, they explicitly put forth the commanding officer's watch standing tenets. Second, Standing Orders define commanding officer philosophy through what Berkenkotter and Huckin term "actual social contexts of use."⁸¹

a. Explicit Philosophy

The first several pages of Standing Orders contain the commanding officer's statement to watch standers. The Captain's signature ends the first section and is followed by numbered Standing Orders that deal with specific situations or reference information. This first section is, as one CO described it, is "the most important part"⁸² of Standing Orders because it explicitly spells out what the commanding officer expects from watch standers. In other words, it contains the CO's watch standing philosophy.

One commanding officer describes the first two pages of Standing Orders as his "motherhood and apple pie."⁸³ In other words, this one page of Standing Orders contains his most closely held watch standing beliefs. Items contained in this section are "not specific" but rather tenets containing "experience" that the CO wanted to "emphasize when people are on the bridge" standing watch.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas N. Huckin, "Rethinking Genre from a Sociocognitive Perspective," 476.

⁸² Interview with commanding officer A.

⁸³ Interview with commanding officer C.

⁸⁴ Interview with commanding officer C.

These philosophical statements set the tone for the rest of the document, providing watch standers not with specific guidance but rather with philosophies to use when making decisions. For example, one commanding officer lists items such as "always have a 'Plan B'" and "Listen to the voice. In most situations it is better to take action sooner rather than later. Think ahead and be forehanded."⁸⁵ These philosophical sayings illustrate the genre's ability to meet watch standers' decision-making needs with what Devitt calls "effectiveness and appropriateness."⁸⁶ They do so not through specific guidance but with a "framework for decision-making,"⁸⁷ in other words, a commanding officer's philosophy.

b. Standing Order Use

The second manner in which Standing Orders present commanding officer leadership and watch standing philosophy is by the way in which the document is actually used. Two specific methods of use provide insight into commanding officer watch standing philosophies. First, COs use Standing Orders as strict instruction and second, they use Standing Orders to provide watch stander guidance as discussed above.

Commanding Officers expect strict watch stander adherence to some parts of their Standing Orders. For example, if the Standing Orders require that the officer of the deck call the captain, the CO "expect[s] a phone call."⁸⁸ No deviation or interpretation is expected. This strict adherence stems from the commanding officer belief

⁸⁵ Commanding Officer's Standing Orders.

⁸⁶ Amy J. Devitt, "Generalizing About Genre," 576.

⁸⁷ Interview with commanding officer, November 22, 2005.

⁸⁸ Interview with commanding officer B

that "most of the stuff in [Standing Orders] is correct and most of it will give [watch standers] a good course of action."⁸⁹ This proper course of action ensures ship safety in dangerous high-risk situations.

On the other hand, commanding officers, "don't ever want somebody just to be a robot."⁹⁰ They expect watch standers to use Standing Orders as an "entering argument."⁹¹ Put another way, Standing Orders act as the "framework on what judgment shall be used on watch."⁹² Instead of blindly following the guidance contained in Standing Orders, commanding officers need their watch standers to ask "why we're doing something"⁹³ in certain situations. Commanding officers expect watch standers to look beyond just specific actions they require. In fact, watch standers are expected to fully understand actions required of them. Understanding provides both the underpinnings for correct decisions in critical situations and the ability to ask the right questions if something seems amiss. Greater understanding does not only come from specific guidance but rather stems from the commanding officer's philosophy.

Captains demonstrate their watch standing philosophies in how they use—and how they expect watch standers to use—Standing Orders. Commanding officers agree that notification and reporting requirements should be strictly interpreted because they ensure safety in highly dangerous situations. Additionally, leadership and watch

⁸⁹ Interview with commanding officer C.

⁹⁰ Interview with commanding officer C.

⁹¹ Interview with commanding officer B

⁹² Interview with commanding officer A.

⁹³ Interview with commanding officer A.

standing philosophies are further demonstrated in the view of Standing orders as a guide, rather than simply a literal order. Using Standing Orders this way gives watch standers the latitude to make decisions in unexpected or quickly developing situations.

3. Genre and Change

According to Berkenkotter, genres operate at the boundary of stability and change.⁹⁴ Incremental changes from commanding officer to commanding officer clearly illustrate this stability-change boundary. In fact, as Hyland notes, genres "may change from the inside, from the small acts of individual writers giving expression to their intentions."⁹⁵ Standing Orders, as a genre, are not completely restrictive in nature; commanding officers have the ability to—and do—exercise individual preferences with each iteration of Standing Orders.

Commanding officers often sign their predecessors Standing Orders and make changes they consider merely, "procedural things" not "significant changes."⁹⁶ However, these small, incremental changes allow the captain to use the Standing Orders in accordance with his watch standing philosophy. As such, these seemingly minor changes are indeed significant.

These small changes, mostly to reporting and permission requirements, vividly portray the commanding officer's individual philosophy. The changes reflect parts of each CO's "personal ambition, private intentions, and

⁹⁴ Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas N. Huckin, "Rethinking Genre From a Sociocognitive Perspective," 481.

⁹⁵ Ken Hyland, *Disciplinary Discourses*, 173.

⁹⁶ Interview with commanding officer B.

individual experience."⁹⁷ One officer of the deck said that a previous commanding officer was a micromanager who wanted to be informed of the, "smallest minutiae of what was going on up on the bridge."⁹⁸ The next CO was the polar opposite, a "big picture guy" who wanted watch standers to make decisions on their own. The first commanding officer (the micromanager) wanted information from watch standers beyond that required in his Standing Orders. The second, big picture focused commanding officer actually admonished watch standers for calling him with information outside of his Standing Order requirements, thus reinforcing their responsibility to make decisions.

Despite the differences in philosophy, the actual changes between Standing Orders were considered "minimal"⁹⁹ by both the captain and the OOD. Some specific changes—in addition to the difference in how Standing Orders are used—were relaxations in reporting and permission criteria. These changes were shifts in watch standing philosophy but because, according to Hyland, the changes were, "subtle and realized within the boundaries of what [was]...recognized as typical practice,"¹⁰⁰ both CO and OOD saw the changes as insignificant. This illustrates both the way in which seemingly insignificant changes occur and how, because of the genre's stability, minor changes act as a vehicle for shifts in watch standing philosophy.

4. Power and the Ability to Influence Genres

Berkenkotter and Huckin argue that writers in a genre hold power within an organization because of their ability

⁹⁷ Ken Hyland, *Disciplinary Discourses*, 173.

⁹⁸ Interview with officer of the deck 2.

⁹⁹ Interview with officer of the deck 3.

¹⁰⁰ Ken Hyland, *Disciplinary Discourses*, 173.

to "shape the genre to better serve their needs."¹⁰¹ In other words, even through what seem to be minor changes between commanding officers, these changes in fact emphasize the commanding officer's power in the shipboard organization. Each change, such as a reduction in CPA reporting range, can signal much larger philosophical differences in commanding officer philosophy.

The ability to influence action within an organization, while operating within a well-defined genre, further defines the captain's high level of power aboard ships. As we have seen, the Standing Orders genre is fairly stable and changes made within the generic framework are relatively small. However, because these minor changes occur in critical areas concerning commanding officer philosophy, they highlight individual captain's power aboard ships. The ability to make changes within the genre further emphasizes the unique responsibility and authority of a commanding officer.

E. FACILITATE ACTION

In addition to promulgating a commanding officer's philosophy, Standing Orders facilitate action in watch standers. As discussed previously, the officer of the deck's responsibility is such that he or she must take action to keep the ship safe. Standing orders are considered the primary reference for bridge watch standers and thus facilitate safe and effective action in potentially dangerous situations. Commanding Officers use the Standing Orders genre to allow watch standers to respond effectively "to the exigencies of [possible]

¹⁰¹ Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas N. Huckin, "Rethinking Genre From a Sociocognitive Perspective," 482.

situation[s]" they face on the bridge of a ship.¹⁰² Standing Orders facilitate watch stander action through specific content in addition to promoting overall watch stander knowledge. Furthermore, genre theory provides a window through which to observe specific ways in which commanding officers create action through Standing Orders. Finally, genre theory tells us more about Standing Orders formation in response to watch stander need for information.

1. Facilitating Action Through Content

In order to keep the ship safe from harm, Standing orders contain both reference-oriented and action-oriented material to facilitate action. Reference-oriented material provides background necessary for prompt and effective watch stander action. Action-oriented material provides specific steps for watch standers to take in the face of dangerous situations. Differentiating between both types of material displays a captain's, in Berkenkotter and Huckin's terms, "sense of what is appropriate to a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular time."¹⁰³

Reference-oriented material includes topics such as weather, basic information on maneuvering, or specific ship performance data. Taken alone, none of these subjects directly facilitate action. However, looking at Standing Orders as "one-stop shopping for the new...bridge watch standers"¹⁰⁴ allows watch standers to reference information in one place rather than having to look for it elsewhere. For the most part, commanding officers expect watch

¹⁰² Berkenkotter and Huckin, "Rethinking Genre," 482.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 478.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with commanding officer C.

standers "to be familiar"¹⁰⁵ with this type of information in order to facilitate decision-making.

Action-oriented material, on the other hand, mandates specific steps or actions to take in response to a given situation. For example, captains expect watch standers to know the "immediate actions that need to happen" in the event of a man overboard. Action-oriented material is time critical. In fact, commanding officers feel that if a watch stander has to look up action-oriented material, he or she is "a day late and a dollar short."¹⁰⁶ Required reports and permissions fall into the action oriented category. Captains want their watch standers to memorize "what reports are required to be made."¹⁰⁷ Obviously, this knowledge facilitates quicker watch stander action in high-risk situations.

2. Watch Stander Knowledge of Standing Orders

Whether the material is action or reference oriented, commanding officers demand their watch standers maintain comprehensive knowledge of their Standing Orders. Commanding officers "don't expect [watch standers] to be fully memorized," but do expect them to be "familiar with them" enough to know that something is in them.¹⁰⁸ Or similarly, Captains do not expect watch standers to "know them word for word," but expect them to know, "the context" or gist of what they contain.¹⁰⁹

These commanding officer expectations mean that watch standers must go beyond the once a month read of Standing

¹⁰⁵ Interview with commanding officer B.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with commanding officer A.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with commanding officer A.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with commanding officer B.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with commanding officer A.

Orders required by the Navy. In reality, watch standers tend to "look things up all the time."¹¹⁰ Others even "read them every day."¹¹¹ Constant reading and referencing of Standing Orders give watch standers comprehensive Standing Order knowledge.

To maintain proficiency in Standing Order knowledge, officers of the deck "train to" them.¹¹² In other words, the OOD, being responsible for ship safety, trains his or her watch team on information and procedures contained in the Standing Orders. This training allows members of the bridge team to respond appropriately when confronted with high-risk situations.

3. Power and Action

Using genre theory and what it tells us about power, we can see that Standing Orders allows the commanding officer to facilitate action in watch standers. In other words, through the document the captain's influence ensures action in his or her subordinates. This ability to influence and create action in watch standers clearly highlights what Hyland would term the commanding officer's "privileged role" in Standing Orders creation and highlights his or her authority and responsibility.¹¹³

Furthermore, the commanding officer has created an information store for the officer of the deck and his or her bridge watch team. This information store is an artifact of power. In other words, the commanding officer, through his ownership of Standing Orders, has become

¹¹⁰ Interview with officer of the deck A.

¹¹¹ Interview with officer of the deck B.

¹¹² Interview with officer of the deck B.

¹¹³ Ken Hyland, *Disciplinary Discourses*, 155.

intrinsic to watch team success. Those charged with keeping his ship safe study and rehearse action based on the captain's document.

4. Action and Standing Order Creation

Genres form in response to recurring situations, and yet they also serve to define those situations to which they respond. In Devitt's words, "the act of constructing the genre—of creating or perceiving the formal traces of a genre—is also the act of constructing the situation."¹¹⁴ Standing Orders were created, in part, to bring together scattered information germane to bridge watch standing. They fill a recurring need to provide information for new bridge watch standers. By filling this need, Standing Orders also defines bridge watch standing by becoming the first place watch standers turn to for information. As commanding officers have written Standing Orders to contain much of the information necessary to stand an effective bridge watch, watch standers have come to use the document as such. In this manner, commanding officers define bridge watch standing through Standing Orders. At the same time, through their tendency to use Standing Orders as the primary bridge resource, watch standers also define the genre of Standing Orders. In this way, the Standing Orders genre both defines and is defined by watch standing.

Viewing Standing Orders as a genre provides deeper insight into the nature of shipboard watch standing. The Standing Orders genre has four communicative purposes as discussed above. Furthermore, genre theory tells us about shipboard watch standing organization, power relationships, the formation of Standing Orders, and Standing Order

¹¹⁴ Amy J. Devitt, "Generalizing About Genre," 578.

change. Greater understanding of the document leads to a greater understanding of the nature of bridge watch standing from its participants to specific actions required of them.

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V. CONCLUSION

1. STANDING ORDERS AS A GENRE

Standing Orders is a unique genre presented by the commanding officer of a ship to his watch standers. This genre has four distinct communicative purposes. First, it establishes and reinforces the relationship between the commanding officer and his or her watch standers. It also serves the function of making tacit, experiential knowledge explicit. Furthermore, Standing Orders issue the commanding officers watch standing philosophy. In its final generic function, Standing Orders facilitate watch stander action.

Understanding these four Standing Order purposes leads to a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the document's importance. Deeper knowledge of communicative purpose allows both writers and users to examine effectiveness. In other words, understanding the nature of the role Standing Orders play aboard ships is the first step in determining the effectiveness of these orders in playing that role.

2. GENRE AND THE ORGANIZATION

Using genre theory to analyze Standing Orders does not end with determining communicative purpose. In fact, defining the genre only begins the process of understanding the organization better. Through communicative purpose, we use generic properties to gain a greater understanding of the source and nature of the commanding officer's power. We can see how command decision-making channels stem from responsibility and authority underlined in standing orders. They also reinforce the commanding officer's power through

knowledge and experience while responding to recurring situations. Finally, we can see how commanding officers can make Standing Orders their own with incremental changes.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING

Understanding is critical to improvement. Without full understanding, organizations cannot make full use of a document. Furthermore, comprehensive understanding allows writers to more effectively shape the genre. As Bazerman says, "detailed attention to disciplinary writing...opens up choices for reevaluation and helps us explore the flexible and manifold resources available,"¹¹⁵ in the organization. Deeper understanding of Standing Orders allows commanding officers to make more informed choices when writing their Standing Orders.

Realizing that the Standing Order genre is extremely stable for example, allows COs to better understand the impact of relatively minor changes. From this understanding, Commanding officers can view their changes to a predecessor's Standing Orders in a different light. Instead of looking at changes to Standing Orders as minor, COs can see that these small changes are actually a reflection of his or her philosophy and style. Watch standers benefit similarly. Understanding the previously unexplored communicative purposes behind Standing Orders give watch standers better perspective on the document and on bridge watch standing in general.

Standing Orders play a major role in establishing and reinforcing commanding officer power and authority. In fact Standing Orders demonstrate CO power explicitly

¹¹⁵ Charles Bazerman, *Constructing Experience*, 77.

through an opening philosophy statement and implicitly through establishment of decision-making triggers. Put simply, Standing Orders are a powerful document. A captain's responsibility and authority aboard ship is unquestioned. Deeper understanding of Standing Orders provides new and illuminating perspectives into an important source of that power.

Standing Orders also effectively present tacit knowledge to bridge watch standers. As a relatively stable genre, Standing Orders contain knowledge gained from CO to CO and generation to generation. As a byproduct of this continuous process, some knowledge remains beyond its time. On the whole though, knowledge contained in Standing Orders provides a source of knowledge far surpassing that of only the signatory CO.

Furthermore, through critical examination of Standing Orders we gain new perspective on the special relationship between CO and OOD. Backed by Navy Regulations, Standing Orders reemphasize the responsibility that the commanding officer places on the officer of the deck. The communication and decision-making frameworks outlined in Standing Orders cement OOD authority in relation to the rest of the bridge watch team. At the same time, the document underscores the responsibility of the OOD to the commanding officer.

Standing Orders affect decision-making and actions taken aboard ship nearly every minute of the day. Information they contain provides everything from sweeping philosophy statements to minute details of specific action. They even provide a source of training for both experienced and inexperienced officers. Standing Orders truly are a

unique and powerful document. Perhaps most importantly, there has been no formal research into this set of documents. My study represents the first effort to look at how Standing Orders are written and used. Genre theory provided the theoretical framework that allowed the study to go beyond the surface, to see what Standing Orders actually do in practice and in the minds of writers and users. This study lays a solid theory-based foundation for further study into several aspects of Standing Orders such as power, communication, and learning among several other analytically rich areas.

4. LIMITATIONS

This study is limited in participants to three commanding officers and their associated watch teams. More participants would provide an even greater spread of ship type, leadership style, and personality. Additionally, the study included analysis based on a combination of interviews and personal experience with shipboard watch standing. While effective, direct observation of Standing Orders in action in concert with interviews would provide an even more comprehensive analysis.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH

Standing Orders are a powerful document, and I believe this study represents the first attempt to examine them critically. This being the case, Standing Orders provide fertile ground for further research. First of all, research into tacit knowledge and its transfer lead to some specific research ideas. I believe that examining Standing Orders through the emerging ideas of knowledge management (specifically the transfer of tacit knowledge) would be of great benefit.

Furthermore, an ethnographically based study of commanding officers and watch standers would yield more detailed results. In a time period as short as two weeks, researchers could observe Standing Orders in action aboard ship. This type of immersive data collection, when combined with subject interviews, would provide further insight into Standing Order use.

Looking at commanding officers and watch standers separately provides another rich potential source for research. A larger study based only on commanding officers would be of great benefit. At the same time, a study focused exclusively on officers of the deck would provide another distinct data source. Either of these studies, using the present study as a solid foundation, would provide specificity and detail regarding Standing Order usage.

Finally, the idea for this study stemmed from making Standing Order communication more direct through bottom-line writing. The lack of Standing Order research necessitated better understanding of writer, user, and document function, however. As further research creates better understanding, research into specific writing techniques may be applied to make Standing Orders even more effective.

Based on the findings of this research, all further research into Standing Orders should have two goals in mind. The first is to deepen commanding officer understanding of the document while the second is to do the same for watch standers. Analysis using genre theory has allowed for more comprehensive understanding at the theoretical level. Further research should either build on

the theoretical framework presented by this study or make the turn toward specific practical understanding. In either case, the results of this work illustrate that Standing Orders remain a powerful and unique document. These findings show the genre worthy of significant further study.

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